

Keys TO THE Kingdom

PRESENTED BY

Bethel A. M. E. Church

SOUTH STREET AT THIRTEENTH

Nashville, Tenn.



Committee:

MISS MARGARET C. McCULLOCH

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I.

The Family

GOD'S PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING

GENESIS 1:26-28. *And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it."*

The beautiful story of how God first made everything is in the book of Beginnings, called Genesis, the first book in our Bible. It tells us that when the world was all fresh and new from God's hand he placed in it a human family, a man and his wife, made in the likeness of God because God had breathed his spirit into them. This man and woman He told to be help mates to each other, to live together as man and wife and to bring children into the world. This was His plan for human life. Before there was any other form of human organization, church, or school, or government, or business, there was a family created and planned by God for the carrying on of human life. And it is still his plan. Without the family there could be no human life and all our other organizations would wither away and die. So the family is central in God's plan for human life.

God made our bodies and breathed His spirit into us and has told us to keep our bodies clean and strong and healthy as His dwelling place. Parents have a duty to give their children a good chance to live and be strong and this means obeying God about keeping our own bodies healthy and clean and also teaching our children to do the same. And God made husband and wife to be faithful to each other all their lives and to bear children and

take care of them. This is the second duty of people who marry. God planned that children should obey and honor their parents and learn for them, and be loyal and helpful and forgiving to each other. These are the special duties of children. And the whole family was made to worship and love God as Father of us all. If our home is as God planned "Home" will always be to us a beautiful word—and father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter,—dear and beautiful words through which we grow to understand each other and to understand God in whose likeness we were made according to his plan.

II.

What Jesus Christ Said About Family Life

MATTHEW 19:4-6. *And he (Jesus) answered and said unto them, "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain (two) but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined, let not man put asunder."*

For hundreds and hundreds of years God went on teaching people about the family. One of the ten commandments He gave through Moses was "Honor thy father and thy mother." Then God sent his own son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, and all throughout His life He taught both by His life and His words how holy the family and its life should be.

Jesus himself was born into a human family and loved them all his life. There were Joseph and Mary, and his younger brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, and some younger sisters whose names we do not know. He lived with His family all through His boyhood and youth. They took Him to the

church or temple and dedicated Him to God and He lived in the home and was obedient to them. Almost his last thought as He hung on the cross was for His mother, when He turned to His friend John and left His mother in John's care, asking John to be to her as a son. After He died His brother James became the head of the church He had founded in Jerusalem. When Jesus wanted us to understand God, He used the family to explain God by and said God is like a father and we are like children to Him. When He wanted to teach us how to treat other men and women; he said, treat them as brothers and sisters. He taught that husbands and wives should be faithful to each other all their lives. So He placed the Christian family in the center of our religion. "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen," Jesus asked, "How can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The family is not just God's first and lasting plan for man; it is the center of our Christian faith and life. It is through this that we learn to love and understand both God and man. When it is strong, faithful, pure, and loving our whole Christian society is strong. When it breaks down we cannot know how to live with men or with God.

A minister was once called to the hospital bedside of a child from a mining community. The child was dying. "I have tried to comfort her," the nurse said, "but every time I tell that she is just going home to God and He will be like a father to her, she goes into a screaming fit of terror." The minister, a wise fatherly man, asked, "What is her father like?" "I don't know," the nurse said. He sent for the head nurse and again asked, "What is the child's father like?" "Oh, don't send for him!" cried the nurse, "He is a drunkard. She is dying because he beat her to death."

Is it a wonder she screamed with fear at the thought of God being like a father? What chance had that father given his child to understand "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

"God is your Father, and all ye are brethren."

Does our home interpret to our children God's fatherhood, our childhood, and the loving relation He meant by "brothers and sisters?"

III.

The Church Is Christ's Own Family

MATTHEW 12:49, 50. *And he, Jesus, stretched forth his hand towards his disciples and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."*

God is the heavenly Father of us all, of all human beings even if we do not recognize Him; but the church is the family of those who live as God's children, who recognize God as their Father and who will do His will. Riches and poverty, race and nationality, strong bodies and crippled bodies, brilliant minds and dull minds, none of these differences have anything to do with our being members of God's family, the church. Jesus gave just one test—doing God's will. Whoever does that He said, is brother, sister, or mother to Him.

This is the nature and purpose of the church, to be a great family of God's children, living together in love towards Him and towards each other, coming together to worship Him, to learn His will, and to grow as Jesus grew "in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."

Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Is our church like this—a big family of Christians loving each other and helping each other to learn God's will and to do it and welcoming anyone, rich or poor, high or low, colored or white, native American or foreigner, if only he is trying to do God's will?

Three ministers came into a country town in the mountains. Two sought out the good, respectable, prosperous people. They got them together and built fine churches. A third went up into the mountains where poor people lived on lonely little farms. They hadn't seen a Christian minister in many years and at first they cursed him, spat on him, and drove him from their doors. But he carried their sick children to the hospital, read to their blind old parents, helped them organize a fire brigade to save each other's homes from fire, helped them organize to build a new school building for their children. And as they saw him poor, hard-working, like themselves, travelling the mountains for them in all weathers, many began to love him and to listen to him. Drunkards fought with drink and grew sober; broken and quarreling families became reconciled; the sick were healed; people learned to be neighborly to each other; and a few were converted to believe in Jesus and to be baptized. Together they built with their own hands a little chapel on the mountain side with plain wooden benches. The two rich ministers said he had failed. What did Jesus think who came to seek and save that which was lost? Is our church a seeking and saving church? Are we seeking and saving people?

IV.

The Church Is Helpful

JOHN 21:15-27.

Jesus speaking to Simon Peter asked him three times, Simon, son of Jonas, Lovest thou me? Each time Peter answered, yes. Jesus told him "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." When Jesus described God's judgment of us He said many people would be surprised. Some would think they had been good church people all their lives and Jesus would send them away saying, "I know you not,"—"I was hungry and you did not feed me,

sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Others would be equally surprised because they did not think they were very good, but Jesus would say, "Come, you blessed of my Father—I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you visited me." And all will exclaim, "We never saw you in any of these troubles." Then Jesus will answer, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers ye did it to me." What a thought! Whatever we do to any of God's children, Christ's little brothers and sisters, we do to him. If we love Him we will feed His sheep. So the church has always been helpful. Through it Christians share with each other in need, comfort each other in sorrow, take care of each other in sickness, teach each other in ignorance, pray for each other when in need of God's help.

Worshipping God on Sunday is an important part of the church's life; but it is only a part. Unless we are loving and helpful to one another all through the week in all these practical ways we are not true church members.

Often too, we need to do more to help each other than we can do as separate individuals. So the church as an organization sends out missionaries, trains ministers, conducts Sunday Schools, founds hospitals for the sick, runs playgrounds for children, provides for the aged and helpless, and speaks to those in authority for those too weak or ignorant or oppressed to speak for themselves. It is God's special agent for carrying on His work in the world, meant to be a light to those in darkness, a help to those in need, a friend to the friendless, and a voice and shield for the defenseless.

V.

Keeping The Sabbath

EXODUS 20:8-11; Compare DEUT. 5:12-15. *"Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day."*

Many Christians are confused about Sunday and the Sabbath. But it is quite simple. Saturday was the old Sabbath. Sunday is now the new or Christian Sabbath. Our Bible is in two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament means God's old agreement with men, through Abraham and Moses and other great religious leaders before Jesus. But when God sent Jesus Christ, He made a new agreement or "Testament" with men through Christ. So whatever Christ said or did took the place of the older way.

In the Old Testament we read that we are to keep holy the seventh day, for it is God's Sabbath. On that day we are not to do any work, nor to make any other people do any work, not even our animals. We are to make it a day of rest and worship. Two reasons are given. The first is that God made the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so God blessed the seventh and made it holy. The second is that the Hebrews, God's chosen people, had once been slaves themselves; so they should remember not to make their servants work. Here are the two main thoughts—to worship God for His great work and goodness, and to give people who work a day of rest. So the Jews still keep the seventh day, Saturday, a day of rest and worship. Jesus kept the sabbath and went to the synagogue or Jewish church every Sabbath day to worship.

But after Jesus had died, He rose from the dead on the first day of the week and that made the first day the most holy day for Christians. Ever since then the first day of the week has been the Sabbath for Christians. So this is the third and greatest reason for keeping the Sabbath holy—our Christian Sab-

bath, Sunday, is the day of Christ's resurrection, when we should give thanks to God that Jesus lived, and died, and rose again, and opened to us the gate of life eternal. It is the day of all days when we should devote ourselves to honoring God and Jesus Christ and to praise, to prayer, and to quiet life at home with our families. We should spend it helping each other in the church and in the home to grow in the knowledge—and worship and love God and His Son Jesus Christ.

The important question is not which day of the week we all keep but how we keep it. Once upon a time as Jesus was sitting by a well, a woman came to the well to get water. She was a Samaritan, a member of a country next to the Jews' country; Jesus was a Jew. She asked Him a question. She said, "Our people have a mountain we call God's holy mountain and we say people should worship there. Your people have a mountain they call God's holy mountain and say people should worship there. Which do you say?"

Jesus said, "Neither is right. Anyone anywhere who worships God in spirit and in truth is worshipping Him rightly." Most Christians keep the newer Sabbath the first day, a few keep the old Sabbath or seventh day. That is not what Jesus cares about. He asks us: Do you make it God's day in spirit and in truth?

VI.

What Jesus Had To Say About Our Neighbor

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This is the command of Jesus. And this is the basic principle of all social justice.

Who is my neighbor? He is the man next door and also the man in Shanghai. He is the man who belongs to the Methodist church or to the Baptist church and also the man who goes to the priest's confessional. He is the man whose skin is white and also the man whose skin is colored. He is the man who salutes the Stars and Stripes and also the man who dwells under the foreign flag. My neighbor is the man in need. My neighbor is every man, for all men are the children of my heavenly Father.

How am I to love my neighbors? Jesus meant that we were to maintain an attitude of active, intelligent good will toward them. Notice the words, "active" and "intelligent." An example: A certain Indian saint dwelt for years in a lonely cell in the city of Benares. Thousands of people from all over India made pilgrimages every year to pay honor to him. His heart was full of good will toward everybody but he did nothing about it. His good will was neither active nor intelligent. Jesus would not call such a man a saint, for the old man missed the meaning of love. Love is more than a fond feeling; love expresses itself in deeds. If I love my neighbor as myself, I will demand for him the same rights and opportunities that I enjoy. If I love my neighbor, I will share with him the best that I have. This means sharing the things I have when he needs them, and sharing my time and strength with him in his need. But it means more. The best I have is the "riches that are in Christ Jesus."

VII.

God's Great Family—Mankind

ACTS 17:26-28. *"God that made the world hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the whole earth . . . that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might seek after him and find him.*

ISAIAH 2:4. *"And men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up its hand against nation; neither shall they learn war any more."*

MATTHEW 5:43-45. *Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."*

These three passages show us God's plan, God's promise, and God's way. He planned and made the world, and He is Father of us all. He made us all His children and so brothers and sisters of each other. He promises that some day there will be no more wars, but we shall all live together in peace. And He showed us the way. We are all to seek Him, in hopes we may find Him, and to love our fellowmen, even our enemies. When we do this we live as He planned; we show ourselves His children because we are like Him, who gives life and sun and rain to all of us even when we do wrong, because we are His children and He loves us still in spite of our faults.

So we are taught that whoever we are, English or Germans, Russians, Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Negroes, Indians,

White people, rich and poor, wise and foolish, even good and bad, we are all God's children that He loves. Yes, God so loved the world—not just you or me—but everyone, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that all who believe on Him might not perish but have everlasting life.” And that Son, Jesus Christ, showed us the way of life. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, preached the gospel to the poor, comforted the broken hearted, made friends with the stranger, the foreigner, and the friendless men and women whom no one else loved. He loved both his own people the Jews and their enemies the Romans. And when men laid hands on Him and put Him to death He neither fought back nor prayed against them; but willingly gave up His life for us all, even for His enemies, praying as He died on the cross, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

The whole human race is God's great family; and some day we shall have peace, and no more war, for God has promised it; but He has set us a condition:—we must learn to love all men of all nations and races, even our enemies, to pray not against them but for them, and to return good for evil, for this is God's way and the way of His Son Jesus Christ. It is the way He has called upon us to live as His children. When we learn to obey “nation will not lift up hand against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

VIII.

The Church Is Holy

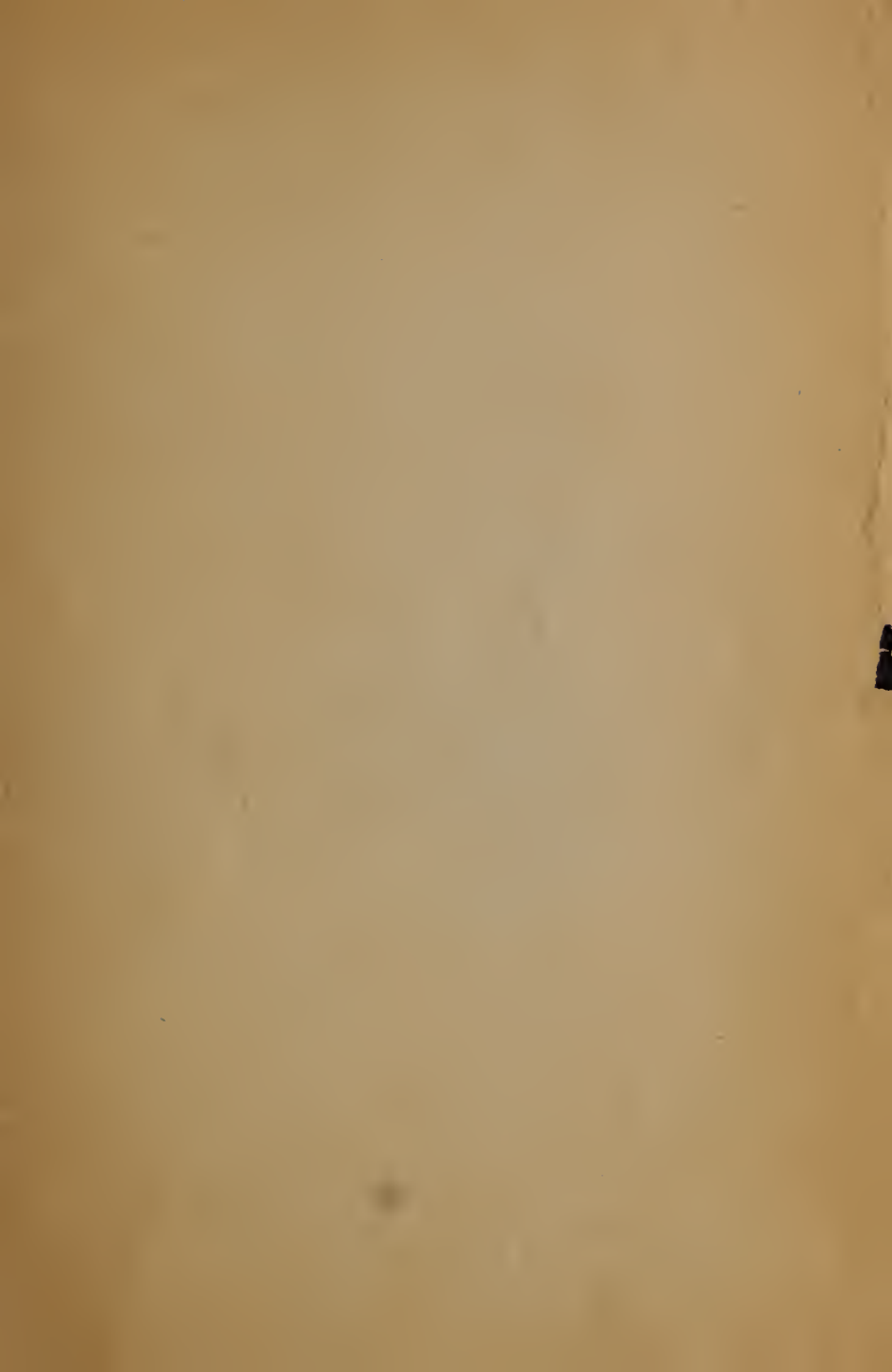
EXODUS 3:5. (*God called to Moses out of a bush that burned but was not burned up*) “*And he said, draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*”

The church is God's family, and it is holy because it belongs to God who is holy. It is His will that we treat it with respect and reverence and love, for it is through this holy family that He speaks to us. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name there is Christ in the midst of them, and that little gathering is holy. When we live as Christ taught us the church is strengthened; when we are irreverent, disrespectful, disobedient, impure, quarrelsome, we put the whole church family to shame, and treat holy things in an unholy manner. Even the buildings in which a church worships should be treated with reverence, for it is here that we meet to talk face to face with God. God told Moses to take off his shoes, for the very ground he stood on was holy because God was there speaking to him. So he tells us to show respect in church because that is one place He meets and speaks to us. We need to be quiet, orderly, respectful in the church building, and to keep it clean and beautiful. God's word is holy. The Bible in which it is printed should always be treated with respect and care, and when someone is reading from it we should be silent and listen. Prayer is holy, because it is speaking with God, and no one should talk or whisper, wander about, or be looking here and there when someone else in the group is leading in prayer, because God is with us when we pray and it is showing disrespect to His holy presence to do these things. Money given to the church is holy. It should be offered with prayer that it

may be acceptable to God, and that He will show us how to use it rightly in His service. All these are parts of the church's life and so they are holy, but the church itself is made up of God and all His children who seek to do His will, anywhere on earth or in heaven. Are we a part of that church and do we love it, pray for it, and show it reverence?







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